Stéphane Robert

From reflexive to intensifying uses of the HEAD in Wolof: semantic continuity of a metonymy

Abstract:

The grammaticalization of body part terms as reflexives is well known and widely discussed (e.g. Heine 2000, Schadt 2000, Evseeva & Salaberri 2018). However, the relation between the different grammaticalized uses of these terms is seldom accounted for, in particular that between reflexive pronouns and emphatic ‘self’ markers (Kemmer 1993), which were described as ‘intensifiers’ by Koenig and Siemund (2000). The purpose of this paper is to analyze the semantic continuity (and discontinuity) of the different uses of the word for HEAD (bopp) in Wolof, an Atlantic language mainly spoken in Senegal.

A brief overview will first present the various grammatical uses of the word bopp, along with their contexts of use. Those range from direct (1) and indirect (2) reflexive pronoun to adnominal intensifier (4) through a genitival reflexive (3).

(1) Xam-al sa bopp [D 2003]
know.IMP POSS.2SG head
‘Know yourself’

(2) Jënd-al na bopp-am woto [D]
buy-APPL PRF.3SG head-POSS.3SG car
‘He bought (for) himself a car’

(3) Sàmba yàq na gaal-u bopp-am
N.PR ruin PRF.3SG dugout-GEN.SG head-POSS.3SG
‘Sàmba has damaged his own dugout’ (lit. the dugout of his head)

(4) Directeur bi ci bopp-am jiñ na Sàmba [D]
director DEF in head-POSS.3SG accuse PRF.3SG N.PR
‘The director in person ( himself) has accused Sàmba’
These various uses are then analyzed according to the scope of the reflexive anaphora. With direct and indirect reflexives, the reflexive anaphora scopes over two different semantic roles (agent vs. patient or beneficiary). Being restrictively used for typically other-directed processes, these reflexive constructions also imply that alternative (more expected) agents are discarded, producing an emphasis on self-affectedness or self-benefit. This centering effect on the actual participant, due here to backgrounded elements in the semantics of the verb, is even clearer (because explicitly marked), when the reflexive anaphora refers to the same participant in the same semantic role. This is the case, for the oblique reflexive, the genitive reflexive, and the adnominal intensifier. In all these constructions, the reflexive anaphora functions a re-identification of the referent in the same role, producing an intensive effect by centering on the identity of the referent and discarding the alternative participants.

Alltogether, the semantic restrictions as well as the semantics of the various reflexive constructions in Wolof, emphasizing the agentivity, responsibility or identity of the referent, point to a metonymic use of the HEAD for the PERSON or INDIVIDUAL, which is in accordance with its various lexical uses.

References:


